RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS OF **MUSLIM WOMEN**

Dr. Israr Ahmad

English Translation
Khalid Mahmood

Shoba Samo Basr

Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

اِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِيْنَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ
وَالْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ
وَالْقٰنِتِيْنَ وَالْقٰنِتٰتِ
وَالصّٰدِقِيْنَ وَالصّٰدِقَاتِ
وَالصّٰبِرِيْنَ وَالصّٰبِرٰتِ
وَالْخٰشِعِيْنَ وَالْخٰشِعٰتِ
وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِيْنَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقٰتِ
وَالصَّائِمِيْنَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ
وَالْحٰفِظِيْنَ فُرُوْجَهُمْ وَالْحٰفِظٰتِ
وَالذّٰكِرِيْنَ اللّٰهَ كَثِيْرًا وَّالذّٰكِرَاتِ
اَعَدَّ اللّٰهُ لَهُمْ مَّغْفِرَةً وَّاَجْرًا عَظِيْمًا

(سورة الاحزاب لا لا: ج لا)

In the Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

Lo! men who surrender unto Allah,
and women who surrender,
and men who believe
and women who believe,
and men who obey
and women who obey,
and men who speak the truth
and women who speak the truth,
and men who persevere (in righteousness)
and women who persevere,
and men who are humble
and women who are humble,
and men who give alms
and women who give alms,
and men who fast and women who fast,
and men who guard their modesty
and women who guard (their modesty),
and men who remember Allah much
and women who remember—
Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness
and a vast reward.

Foreword

In the realm of collective human life, mankind has been grappling with certain problems that have plagued many a civilizations and cultures. The varied responses of different civilizations and cultures, to these problems, have been in similitude to the swings of a pendulum, fluctuating from one extreme response to another, trying desperately to find the equilibrium in order to achieve harmony and peace among the members of a society. Among such problems is one that has been present since time immemorial *viz* the responsibilities and status of men and women in society. From the killings of enfant females in old Arabia to the absolute freedom of modern Western female, mankind has witnessed one failure after another in achieving an equilibrium between the responsibilities of the two genders so that both can have their rightful place in and make contributions to a society, according to and in harmony with their inherent physical and psychological natures.

Only once in human history, has a response been articulated and implemented which established the yearned equilibrium. That response was the one put forth by the Muslim civilization in its early pristine stages due to the revolution brought about by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). For the first time, women were awarded rights unparalleled in history. While debates ensued elsewhere in the world as to whether women had the right to worship God as men, Islam announced the spiritual equivalence of men and women. When in some places in the world, women were seen and used as chattels, Islam bestowed upon them their rightful share in inheritance. When women were being buried alive, Islam denounced this devilish deed and honored the parents who raised daughters. However, as decadence creeped into the Islamic civilization, so did the proper treatment and status of women.

In modern times, in the wake of the feminist movement which, having arisen in the West and now spreading all over the world, the issue of women's rights, status, and liberation has once again emerged onto the world stage. This time the issue is not as to what is the proper status of women. Rather, the Western civilization has articulated a response to the problem according to a purely materialistic view devoid of all spiritual, transcendental and traditional considerations and is now coercively enforcing its version onto other civilizations. Muslim civilization, perhaps the most spiritually motivated, tradition-based, religiously devout civilization present today, is the most defiant in accepting the western ideal of the modern female. It is for this reason that the Muslim civilization is the prime target of the present "Women Lib" propaganda.

Under the influence of the western ideals of femininity and social values, the Muslim world itself is engulfed in much confusion and controversy over this topic. This is due to two reasons. Firstly, the backward and ignorant Muslims have imposed their own self-forged model upon the Muslim woman. This model has indeed reduced the Muslim woman to merely a beast of household

burdens and a sex-maid, and imperceptibly negates and denies her independent spiritual existence. Secondly, in stark contrast to this, the Muslim proponents of the western model are quite successfully propagating, indeed forcing, the western ideal onto Muslim societies via print and electronic media. In order to achieve their goal, these proponents, along with their western counterparts, have not only rejected the true Islamic model but have categorically engaged in perverting the Islamic teachings. Hence, the logical resultant, a conflict between the two ideals. This necessitates the clarification of the true Islamic ideal *viz* the status and obligations of women and their rightful place in society.

The present tract by Dr. Israr Ahmed is an attempt to clarify the status which Islam has awarded to women and their obligations *viz a viz* the framework of family and society. The tract is based on a speech delivered by Dr. Israr Ahmed in June 1991 on the occasion of a conference held by Women's Wing of Tanzeem-e-Islami in Qur'an Academy Lahore. The original speech, in Urdu, was converted to booklet form in May 1996. The present tract is a translation of the Urdu booklet rendered into English by Momina Khan and revised by Khalid Mahmood. The Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an is grateful to both of them for their efforts in this endeavor.

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The Importance of Religious Obligations

It is essential for every individual to acquire a comprehensive understanding of his religious obligations. If a person is ignorant of the duties assigned to him by Allah (SWT) through His *Deen* (the comprehensive code of life), he will be unable to perform his obligations in true spirits. Similarly, if one's concept of the duties incumbent upon him is deficient in any way, he can only partially carry out his religious responsibilities. In such a case he is likely to meet with failure on the Day of Judgment no matter how sincerely committed he might have been to his religion in his opinion.

Another aspect of this problem is equally important that concerns women in special. There is a possibility that a person might take upon himself certain responsibilities that his religion has not imposed on him. This is bound to lead to disastrous consequences because even the desire to do good, when it exceeds the prescribed boundaries, gets channelized to completely undesirable directions. Monasticism, for instance, is the result of human extremism in trying to be pious. It was the desire to do good that led to the concept of celibacy in Christianity which later became the breeding ground for vice and immorality. Hence, negative and undesirable consequences are bound to follow if anyone overburdens his responsibilities. Therefore we must learn and understand our true religious duties and must not burden ourselves with the duties that have not been imposed upon us. When an individual begins to assign certain duties to himself other than the ones Allah (SWT) has imposed on him, he exposes himself to the danger of the *Qur'an*ic indictment stated in *Surah* al-Nisa:

> *"We appoint for him that unto which he himself has turned." [al-Qur'an 4:115]* [1]

In other words Allah (SWT) lets him opt for the way he himself has chosen and withdraws His support and help.

Therefore, with respect to the obligations we owe to Allah (SWT), we must have a comprehensive consciousness regarding the rights of Allah (SWT) that we have to fulfill, the rights of our 'self' upon us and the rights regarding our fellow human beings. We have to learn to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate, legal and illegal as ordained by Allah (SWT). If we blindly follow our innate and instinctive needs, we are bound to cross our limits into the premises of forbidden (*Haram*). Similarly we have to perform our duty towards people, and mankind in general, according to the tenets set by Allah (SWT). If this principle is duly followed, our vision will remain clear and our target defined. If, on the other hand, we follow our own whims and wishes, we may, God forbid, become the victims of the *Qur'an*ic prophecy:

نُوَلِّهٖ مَا تَوَلّٰى وَنُصْلِهٖ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَآءَتْ مَصِيْرًا

> *"We appoint for him that unto which he himself has turned and expose him unto Hell, a hapless journey's end." [al-Qur'an 4:115]*

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The Three Levels of Our Religious Duties: An Analogy of a Three-Storied Building.

It will be helpful to use the analogy of a three storied building[2] in order to understand the true nature of our religious obligations. With the help of this analogy, the duties that are particular to men will be explained first.
Then, the duties that are equally applicable to women and men and duties with disparities between the two genders will be pointed out.

The building mentioned comprises of three stories, standing on four pillars. On the ground floor all you can see are the pillars, as there are no walls, but of course there is the foundation beneath the pillars that supports them. Higher floors are dependent on the floors below them. In that respect, top floor is the highest but not the most important part of the building. Most important part is the foundation, while the pillars become the second most important, for they carry the weight of whole the structure. If the foundation or the pillars are weak, the whole structure would collapse down. It is important to note that on the second and third floors, the pillars, hiding behind walls, though still present, become invisible.

The building accurately represents our religious obligations. The foundation of this building is Faith (*Iman*), on which depends the strength of the structure. If the foundation is deep and firmly entrenched in the ground, the above lying structure will be unshakable. On the other hand, if the foundation itself is weak and unstable, the building can come crashing down any moment. The pillars are the four obligatory forms of worship: the daily prayers (*Salah*), fasting (*Saum*), obligatory charity (*Zakah*), and pilgrimage (*Hajj*). In the Holy Qur'an, *Salah* is always preceded by *Zakah*, however, in the building, *Salah* is placed adjacent to *Saum* as both forms of worship are obligatory for all Muslims. Whereas *Zakah* and *Hajj* are binding upon only those Muslims who possess physical and financial capacity to perform them.

The roof of the first level can be referred to as *Islam*[3], *Ita'a*[4], *Taqwa*[5], and *'Ibadah*[6]. At this stage the person submits and surrenders wholeheartedly to the commands of Allah (SWT) and His messenger (SAW), becoming in the truest sense of the word, an *'Abd'* – 'slave', thereby fulfilling the very purpose of his creation. As Allah (SWT) says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوْنِ

"I created the 'jinn' and humankind only that they might worship Me." [al-Qur'an 51:56]

When this submission, obedience, and piety reaches its climax, Islam becomes *Ihsan* — the level of consciousness characterized by the feeling that one is seeing Allah (SWT). This is the ground floor of the edifice we are describing.

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[2] Refer to the inside of front cover.
[3] 'Submission' and 'surrender'
[4] 'Obedience'
[5] Being conscious of Allah (SWT)
[6] 'Slavery' to Allah (SWT)

At the second level, the person invites others towards the message of Islam, striving to the best of his ability to spread and propagate[7] it. He enjoins good and forbids evil[8] and performs the sublime duty of being witness-bearer against mankind[9] so that on the Day of Judgment the mankind would not be able to proclaim that they were ignorant of it.

The third story of the building is representative of the establishment of the just social, economic and political system of Islam.[10] Terms such as Islamic Revolution and *Takbeer ar-Rabb*[11] are employed at this level. The goal is to implement Islam in its totality so that the Word of Allah (SWT) reigns supreme as stated in a *Hadith*:

لِتَكُوْنَ كَلِمَةُ اللّٰهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا

"So that the word of Allah becomes supreme."
[Bukhari, Muslim]

With the intention that the "Word of Allah" becomes the law of the land taking precedence over everything else until the whole social structure including the parliament and judiciary are subordinate to it. To work towards this end by utilizing all one's material and mental resources, to live for this cause and be ready to die for it, is what constitutes the third and the highest level of our religious responsibilities.

The Difference Between Men and Women's Obligations

The Ground Level: Near Equal Obligations

There is little, if any, difference between the obligations of the two genders as far as the obligations of the ground floor are concerned. Faith is an essential pre-requisite for the salvation of all human beings irrespective of their gender. The words occurring in *Surah* al-'Asr and *Surah* al-Teen*:*

اِلَّا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ

"save those who believe and do good works"

are general in nature applying to both men and women. Furthermore, it is categorically stated in the *Ayah*[12] 124 of *Surah* al-Nisa that those who act righteously, be they male or female, will surely enter Paradise[13].

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[7] *Tableegh* and *Da'wah*

[8] *Amr bil Ma'roof Wa Nahi 'Anil Munkar*

[9] *Shahadah 'Ala an-Naas*

[10] The Qur'anic term which stands for "to establish the Deen" is:
اِقَامَةُ الدِّيْنِ

[11] "To magnify and proclaim the greatness of Allah (SWT)."

[12] An *Ayah* is a verse of Qur'an. The plural of *Ayah* is *Ayaat*.

The foremost duty of every Muslim, man or woman is firmness of Faith. Then daily prayers and fasting in the month of Ramadan, both being equally compulsory for men and women. *Zakah* and *Hajj* are the duties to be fulfilled by both men and women, who have the ability (physical and financial) to perform them. In addition, women cannot perform *Hajj* unless and until there is a *Mahram*[14] to escort them. Similarly all the restrictions regarding *Halal* and *Haram* are the same for both genders. In short, obedience to Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAW) in all spheres of life is meant for the whole mankind, irrespective of any difference in gender.

The slight difference between the obligations of men and women at the ground level can be understood via the example of *Salah*. Women are exempted from the congregational prayers and encouraged to pray at home. At home, it is preferred that they pray in a room instead of the lawn. If the room happens to have a small chamber within it, then the chamber is preferred over the room.

Exceptional has been the case of the congregational Friday and *Eid* prayers. Women were encouraged by the Prophet (SAW) to attend these two prayers. This was due to the fact that no communication media and other means of propagation (books, magazines or audio/visual facilities) were available in those days. The sermons of Friday and *Eid* prayers were the sole source of education and information for them. However, these are two exceptions and the overriding rule is that it is better for ladies to offer their prayers privately in their homes rather than at public places.

Besides these and other negligible differences, the duties of Muslim men and women at the first stage are similar in nature. It will be pertinent here to discuss three important verses (34-36) of *Surah* al-Ahzab. The addressees of these *Ayah*s are the wives of the Prophet (SAW). The first of these *Ayah*s deals with the acquisition of real and conscious faith, the primary source of which is the *Qur'an* itself. Indeed it is reading the Holy *Qur'an*, learning and teaching it and pondering over it that gives rise to faith and strengthens our conviction. The *Ayah* reads:

وَاذْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلٰى فِىْ بُيُوْتِكُنَّ مِنْ اٰيٰتِ اللّٰهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ

"And bear in mind that which is recited in your houses of the revelations of Allah and wisdom. Lo, Allah is Subtle, Aware." [al-Qur'an 33:34]

The wives of the Prophet (SAW) are being addressed here. It was in their houses that the Prophet (SAW) received the Divine revelation (*Wahi)*, recited its verses, and preached the words of wisdom (*Hikmah*). The word *Hikmah* here refers to the Holy Qur'an, the fountainhead of knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, he (SAW) used to explain the Holy Qur'an in the form of *Hadith*[15], which also reflected the wisdom of Qur'an. The first and foremost lesson that is

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[13] وَمَن يَّعْمَلْ مِنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ مِن ذَكَرٍ اَو اُنْثٰى وَ هُوَ مُوءمِنٌ فَاُولٰٓئِكَ يَدخُلُونَ الجَنَّةَ

"And whoso does good works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, such will enter paradise"

[14] *Mahram* refers to the male with whom a woman can directly interact without having to cover herself.

[15] *Hadith* pertains to the sayings of the Prophet (SAW).

evident from the verse is that we are being told to engage ourselves in reading and comprehending the Holy Qur'an and *Hadith*, and in learning and teaching them. For this is what will sustain and enrich our belief in Allah (SWT) as well as bolster and reinforce it. If we hasten to the stage of preaching without first sufficiently strengthening and entrenching our own belief, we will be putting the cart before the horse.

Let us now reflect on the next *Ayah*. In the Holy Qur'an, usually the grammatical tense of the male gender is used while discussing the desirable traits of both men and women. Therefore whenever men are addressed it is understood that women are also being spoken to. The following *Ayah*, however, is an exception in the sense that both genders are mentioned here separately. This signifies that the qualities that Islam expects of its followers are the same for men and women. The *Ayah* states:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقٰنِتِينَ
وَالْقٰنِتٰتِ وَالصّٰدِقِينَ وَالصّٰدِقَاتِ وَالصّٰبِرِينَ وَالصّٰبِرٰتِ
وَالْخٰشِعِينَ وَالْخٰشِعٰتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقٰتِ
وَالصّٰائِمِينَ وَالصّٰائِمَاتِ وَالْحٰفِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحٰفِظٰتِ
وَالذّٰكِرِينَ اللّٰهَ كَثِيرًا وَّالذّٰكِرَاتِ اَعَدَّ اللّٰهُ لَهُمْ مَّغْفِرَةً وَّاَجْرًا
عَظِيمًا

The ten traits mentioned in this *Ayah* are :

1. اَلْمُسْلِمِيْنَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ

"Muslim men and Muslim women"

Men and women who totally submit themselves to the will of Allah (SWT).

2. اَلْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

"Believing men and believing women"

Those who believe in Allah (SWT), the angels, the prophets, the revealed books and the Day of Judgment.

3. اَلْقٰنِتِيْنَ وَالْقٰنِتٰتِ

"Obedient men and obedient women"

Those who stand like slaves, all vigilant for the Master's call.

4. اَلصّٰدِقِيْنَ وَالصّٰدِقَاتِ

"Truthful men and truthful women"

Those who are true in their words and deeds.

5. اَلصّٰبِرِيْنَ وَالصّٰبِرٰتِ

"Patient men and patient women"

Patience is a very comprehensive term. Patience can mean abstaining from the forbidden. Patience can imply doing Allah's bidding in the face of ordeals. For instance, performing ablution with icy cold water in the winter when warn water is not available is a manifestation of patience and a submission to Allah's will. Patience also refers to remaining steadfast in the face of all odds and calamities while following the straight path.

6. اَلْخٰشِعِيْنَ وَالْخٰشِعٰتِ

"Humble men and humble women"

Who humble themselves in front of Allah (SWT).

7. اَلْمُتَصَدِّقِيْنَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقٰتِ

"Charitable men and charitable women"

Who spend on others despite their own needs for the sake of pleasing Allah (SWT).

8. اَلصَّآئِمِيْنَ وَالصَّآئِمَاتِ

"Fasting men and fasting women"

Those who observe fast to cleanse and purify their soul and body from the lust of materialistic desires and bear the pangs of hunger and thirst only to please Allah (SWT).

9. اَلْحٰفِظِيْنَ فُرُوْجَهُمْ وَالْحٰفِظٰتِ

"Men and women who strictly guard their modesty"

In this respect, Islam imposes the same restrictions on men and women.

10. اَلذّٰكِرِيْنَ اللّٰهَ كَثِيْرًا وَّالذّٰكِرَاتِ

"Men and women who indulge much in Allah's remembrance"

In the next *Ayah*, the essence and the sum up of the first level is stated in a very explicit manner.

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَّلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ اِذَا قَضَى اللّٰهُ وَرَسُوْلُهٗ اَمْرًا
اَنْ يَّكُوْنَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ اَمْرِهِمْ ؕ وَمَنْ يَّعْصِ اللّٰهَ وَرَسُوْلَهٗ
فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلٰلًا مُّبِيْنًا

"And it is not befitting for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His messenger have decided an affair (for them), that they should have any option about their decision; and whoso is rebellious to Allah and His messenger, verily goes astray in error manifest." *[al-Qur'an 33:36]*

This means that there is no room whatsoever for any believing man or woman to act according to their personal preferences once Allah (SWT) and His messenger (SAW) have passed their verdict regarding a particular matter. The only option open to them is to hear and obey. And if one chooses to differ from the decision of Allah (SWT) and His messenger (SAW), be they men or women, it would be plain disobedience and infidelity; they are the ones who have definitely gone astray. This is the essence of *Islam*, *Itaa'a*, and *'Ibadah*. For what is Islam? Total submission to commands of Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAW). What is *Ita'aa*? Obedience to Allaah and His Prophet. What is *'Ibadah*? To become a slave of Allah in all aspects and at all times. The most important factor in this regard is that we are devoid of authority where there is a clear order from Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAW). If authority is exercised against the will of Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAW), it will be against the tenets of Islam. We are only free to act according to our will and understanding if there is no explicit ruling about an issue.

As said earlier there is a minimal difference between the responsibilities of men and women as far as the ground floor is concerned. The disparity gradually becomes more and more pronounced as we advance to the higher levels. It is vital to understand the basis for this disparity in Islam. Islam lays great emphasis on modesty and chastity and aspires to uphold and preserve these values in a Muslim society. That is why there is a separate dress code for men and women and the segregation of the two. The injunctions regarding the dress code (*Satr and Hijab*) are strictly for women and the conditions vary from *Mahram* to non-Ma*hram.*[16] What we need to understand here is that the difference in the nature of the duties assigned to men and women is in order to maintain an atmosphere of modesty, decency and purity in the society.

[16] Non-*Mahrem*s to women are those men with whom women cannot interact.

Islam discourages unnecessary intermingling of genders and determines separate spheres of activity for them. In this context, we can easily understand why a woman's prayer is best in the most secluded part of the house, and why her presence is discouraged in the mosque (though not forbidden). In short, the rationale behind the dissimilarity between men and women's obligations, whether slight or pronounced, is to close all avenues that may lead to indecency and immorality.

The Second Level: The Three Circles Of Da'wah

The second level deals with spreading the message of Islam to others. A general principle of *Tableegh*[17] and *Da'wah*[18], proposed by Islam, is that we should begin by first reforming our own selves. Next, we should focus on those who are closest to us – our immediate family members. Only then we may approach other people. Contrary to this, preaching Islam in foreign lands while the religious condition of one's own house is unsatisfactory, indicates that the process of *Da'wah* has been inversely prioritized. Such practice can never bring about the desired results as were seen as a consequence of *Da'wah* carried out by the Prophet (SAW) and his companions.

If we keep the proper sequence in mind, we can conclude that, for the Muslim woman, the highest priority should be her home. The propagation of Islam is simultaneously carried out in three integrated circles. In the first circle she should bring up her children as Muslims in the true sense of the word. The second circle of *Da'wah* includes Muslim women and the third consists of *Mahram* males. These three circles and domains are the premises in which the Muslim woman is required to perform *Da'wah.* Concerning the first circle, *Surah* Tahreem states:

قُوْٓا اَنْفُسَكُمْ وَاَهْلِيْكُمْ نَارًا

"Save yourself and your families from the fire."
[al-Qur'an 66:6]

In the same context, we should also consider the following *Hadith* narrated by 'Abdullah bin 'Omar (RA) :

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَّكُلُّكُمْ مَّسْئُوْلٌ عَنْ رَّعِيَّتِهٖ

"Everyone of you is a shepherd and every one of you is accountable for his herd."
[Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud]

Just as a shepherd is responsible for his herd, everyone is responsible and accountable for the people he is in charge of. Then the Prophet (SAW) added,

[17] "To convey"
[18] "To invite"

"a man is a custodian of his home and he will be held accountable for his family."

Meaning, everyone will be asked about the duties which he had to perform concerning his family and household. He will be asked about whether he carried out his duties of educating them and fulfilling their rights. Then the Prophet (SAW) said,

وَالْمَرْاَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ فِیْ بَیْتِ زَوْجِهَا وَمَسْئُوْلَةٌ عَنْ رَّعِیَّتِهَا

"A woman is responsible for her husband's home and she will be held accountable for whatever and whoever she is given charge of."

Naturally her children are the most vital part of her husband's home. In another narration, the word 'children' is mentioned separately:

وَالْمَرْاَةُ رَاعِیَةٌ عَلٰی اَھلِ بَیْتِ زَوْجِھَا وَوَلَدِہٖ وَ ھَئی
وَمَسْئُوْلَةٌ عَنھُم

"And woman is responsible for her husband's household and his children and she is accountable for them."

She is accountable for the servants as well but her main responsibility is the children.

The future of a nation depends, to a great extent, on its coming generation and the tremendous task of bearing and rearing it has been placed squarely on the shoulders of the mother. It is the mother who acts as the very embodiment of selflessness, sacrificing her own comfort for the sake of her children. It is the mother who acts as the first school that the child comes in contact with. The poet Iqbal says about a Muslim mother:

آسیا گرداں ولب قرآں سرا

"O Woman! Grind grain while Qur'an is on your lips"

In our childhood we had had the privilege of witnessing with our own eyes such mothers who used to recite the Qur'an while nursing their child and grinding grain. Something of value must transfer from the mother to the child in a subtle and imperceptible manner during this process. After all, we are asked to say A*dhan*[19] and I*qaamah*[20] in the newborn's ears. There has to be some logic behind this ritual. The infant, no doubt, is not capable of making sense of the words but all of us know that a tape-recorder is also a senseless device that efficiently records voice impressions and reproduces them. Therefore, it would not be too far fetched to assume that some meaningful impressions are conveyed to the child's subconscious which leave a lasting impact on his personality. As Iqbal said:

[19] Call fore prayer.
[20] Call to begin the prayer of congregation.

کہ درآغوشِ شبّیرے بگیری!

"In this condition, in your lap, will grow a son like Hussain [RA]"

Hence, the command from the Prophet (SAW):

اُطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنَ الْمَهْدِ اِلَی اللَّحْدِ

"Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." ***[REFERENCE?]***

The major responsibility entrusted to the mother is imparting purposeful education & moral values in her children. To seek other avenues at the cost of this major responsibility is certainly not admissible. If, however, her circumstances are such that she can spare some time, she should definitely do *Da'wah* work outside her home.

What actually is happening in our society is that we tend to preach in the remote corners of the world but overlook our homes. We should remember the Qur'anic admonition :

اَتَاْمُرُوْنَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ اَنْفُسَكُمْ

"Do you enjoin righteousness upon mankind and you yourself forget (to practice it)?" [al-Qur'an 2:44]

We cannot go on a mission to save the world unless we save ourselves first. Our younger generation is at the receiving end of the most vicious onslaught of western cultural influences. The child of today is very susceptible to the modern-day demons of disbelief, apostasy, immodesty and shamelessness. Our youngsters are at the mercy of intriguing media like newspapers, magazines, television and the Internet. In this scenario, if the responsibility of bringing up a child is set aside and women spend more time in preaching outside their homes, this will be reversing the order of her responsibilities.

As for stepping out of the home to preach other women, surely this needs to be done in a very organized manner. In this endeavor, middle-aged women are best suited for the task as the restrictions of Islamic dress code are relaxed to a great extent in their case. *Surah* al-Noor states regarding the aged women:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُنَاحٌ اَنْ يَّضَعْنَ ثِيَابَهُنَّ

"It is alright for them if they put aside their coverings."

They certainly will continue to follow the orders of *Satr*[21], but the orders of *Hijab*[22] will now be relaxed in comparison to a young woman. However, what happens in our society is that the

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[21] *Satar* refers to the parts of body which, in normal conditions, must be

ladies who have always been observing *Satr* and *Hijab* and staying at home become so accustomed to it that they are reluctant to go out even in their old age. This attitude needs to be changed. They should not hesitate to participate in the activities that involve studying and teaching of the Holy Qur'an in their own cities, even if they are not accompanied by their *Mahram*s. As far as young women are concerned it is extremely inappropriate for them to go out alone. If they can afford to devote time to the propagation of their *Deen*, they should cover themselves properly and a *Mahram* should accompany them. Keeping these general guidelines in mind, Qur'anic study circles must be arranged and there should be a systematic and intensive effort to organize women's gatherings on a regular basis for the purpose of effectively promulgating the message of the Holy Qur'an to the masses. This is the most-pressing need of the time.

The third circle of women's efforts in this regard is that of the *Mahram* men i.e., husband, brothers, father, uncles and nephews, *etcetera* (please note that the husband's nephews are not *Mahram*). You must have noticed that under the influence of various Islamic movements like the *Tableeghi Jamaat* and J*amaat-e-Islami*, more and more young men and women belonging to the **middle class (mutawassit)??** are choosing to adopt the Islamic way of life. We see many bearded young men and veiled young women whose parents and other family members are oblivious to Islamic values. In this scenario, the younger generation needs to reach out to the older one to invite them to the right path of Islam. The third circle for Muslim women, therefore, involves their *Mahram* men.

In Pakistan we see that a particular Islamic group sends its female members from door-to-door canvassing prior to elections. As the said group aspires to bring about change through the ballot box, naturally they need to get in touch with the masses for large scale campaigning which probably leaves them no choice but to send the women door to door. But whatever their compulsions are, this practice is highly inappropriate. Even though these women follow the Islamic dress code, which in itself is commendable, nonetheless, they go to houses of people who are completely alien to them. Islam does not allow Muslim women to freely mingle even with unfamiliar women. The list of *Mahram*s given in *Surah* al-Noor includes "their women"[23] –- meaning familiar women who are known to be of decent, righteous character. Hence, Islam does not allow strange women into homes and it certainly does not allow women to go into strange houses.

We believe that the real change in the existing secular system can never be brought about through the prevailing election process. This change claims a moral, ideological, and intellectual revolution that permeates all the spheres (i.e. political, social and economic) of life.

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covered at all times and may not be displayed to anyone but one's spouse. The whole of a woman's body is considered *Satr* except hands, feet, and face excluding ears and hair.

[22] Hijab refers to the parts of body which, in normal conditions, must be hidden from non-*Mahrem*s. *Hijab* refers to *Satr* plus face excluding the eyes.

[23] وَنِسائِهِنَّ

We need to work towards forming a "*Hizb-ullah*"[24], and for that, women should ideally be working within the three circles that have been designated. In exceptional situations, their duties may exceed the ones mentioned. However under the present conditions, working within these three spheres is all that they are required to do in the realm of *Da'wah* and *Tableegh*.

The Third Level: Women and the Struggle for the Establishment of Islam

The third level involves the struggle for an Islamic Revolution, the peak of all obligations, for bringing about an Islamic Order "so that Allaah's Word reigns supreme"[25]. At this stage the formation of an organized and dedicated group of individuals becomes inevitable. Such a group will consist of committed individuals who will stand united for a single purpose: abolishing tyranny of the status quo, to set up in its place, the ideal Islamic System of Social Justice. These individuals will be ready to lay down their lives in the line of duty if the need arises. This is the responsibility that women have been exempted from except in certain extreme cases.

Some people falsely assume that women too are required to participate in this highest level in the hierarchy of our responsibilities. They argue that in the glorious history of Islam, women did leave their homes and sacrifice their lives. Sumayyiah (RA) was martyred along with her husband Yasir (RA). Ruqayyiah (RA) migrated to Madinah just as her husband Usman (RA) did. However, the people who quote these instances fail to realize that the *Hijrah*[26] and *Shahadah*[27] of these women represent the essence and apex of the first level (not the third). It was for the sake of her staunch belief in *Tauheed* – the oneness of Allah (SWT) – that Sumayyiah (RA) did not yield before Abu Jahal. A woman giving her life in order to keep her faith is the foundation (representing *Iman*) of our building structure – where there is no difference in men's and women's responsibilities. It was a matter of standing up for what one believes in and remaining steadfast even if one's life is at stake. It was not a matter of encountering the disbelievers on the battlefield. Even today, if a believing woman is faced with a choice between her faith and her life, the best and the most honorable thing to do is to give up her life rather than her faith. It is, however, permissible in Islam to profess disbelief verbally in such a life threatening situation. Sumayyiah (RA) and Yassir (RA) sacrificed their lives to uphold their faith, whereas their son Ammar (RA) saved his life by orally claiming faithlessness.

Similarly, when practicing Islam becomes impossible in a land then the Muslims should migrate in the way of Allah (SWT). Ruqayyiah (RA) and Umm Habibah (RA) with few other women migrated with their *Mahram*s because life in Makkah was becoming unbearable. Migration, for keeping the Divine message alive while abandoning homeland and belongings is actually holding on to faith, the foundation of the building of Islam. In short, remaining loyal to Faith is something that applies to both men and women as does migrating in the way of Allah (SWT). In this connection, please note the following verse of *Surah* Aal-e-Imran:

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[24] *Hizbullah* is an organization of the true devotees of Allah (SWT).
[25] Bukhari and Muslim
[26] "Migration"
[27] "Martyrdom"

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ اِنِّىْ لَا اُضِيْعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ اَوْ اُنْثٰى بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ فَالَّذِيْنَ هَاجَرُوْا وَاُخْرِجُوْا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَاُوْذُوْا فِىْ سَبِيْلِىْ وَقٰتَلُوْا وَقُتِلُوْا لَاُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّاٰتِهِمْ وَلَاُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنّٰتٍ تَجْرِىْ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْاَنْهٰرُ

"And their Lord hath heard from them (and He says) Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. You are one and the same. So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and suffer damage for My cause, and fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them unto gardens underneath which rivers flow." [al-Qur'an 3:195]

Men and women were all put through the same ordeals during the thirteen-years stay of the Prophet (SAW) in Makkah. They were the victims of the same hatred and persecution. And they were all forced to leave their beloved homes. They also sacrificed their lives for the noble cause of defending their faith. On the other hand, we do not find any instance of female participation in the armed conflicts in which Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his valiant companions raised the flag of the Revolutionary Movement in Arabia.

The Prophet (SAW) sent eight expeditions immediately after the migration to Medina and there is no mention of any women being sent. The first real battle fought in the way of Allah (SWT) in Islamic history was the battle of Badr and the books of *Seerah* make no mention that Muslim women took part in it. On the basis of this, we can easily determine what our religion requires from us. Instead of inventing fictitious duties for us, we should objectively understand our actual responsibilities.

Uhad is the only battle where we find, as an exception, when women participated in the battle but this was an emergency situation. The news that seventy *Sahabah*[28] were martyred had reached Medina. There was the rumor that the Prophet (SAW) himself had been martyred. Naturally there was a state of extreme panic in the city. Moreover, Uhad was only two and a half miles away from Medinah. Therefore, the Muslim women rushed to the scene of the battle to tend the wounded and supply water. In addition, we must keep in mind that the commands regarding *Hijab* had not been revealed at that time. It is important for us to keep the chronological sequence of the events in mind. The orders of *Hijab* were introduced for the first time in *Surah* al-Ahzab, which was revealed after the battle of Ahzab after the fifth year of *Hijrah*. *Surah* al-Noor was revealed in 6th year after *Hijrah* and contains explicit commands about *Hijab.*

Afterwards in *Ghazwa-e-Ahzab*, which was the toughest battle of all, the Muslims fought while their women stayed inside a fortress. There is no evidence of any woman taking part in this battle. Only Safiya (RA) is said to have killed a Jew in self-defence. In 7th year after *Hijrah,* the battle of Khyber was fought. The following incident, narrated in the books of *Hadith* and *Seerah,* throws light on the role of women in this battle:

[28] The companions of the Prophet SAW

"Hashraj bin Ziyad narrates from his grand mother that she and five other women left for Khyber along with the Prophet (SAW). She says, 'When the Prophet (SAW) learned of our presence, he called for us. When we came to him, he was furious and said, 'With whom have you come and with whose permission?' We said, 'We will make wool and work in the cause of Allah (SWT). We have some bandages for the wounded; we will hand arrows to the fighters and give them water.' The Prophet (SAW) said, 'Get up and go back. When Khyber was conquered the Prophet (SAW) gave us a share from the spoils of the battle. 'Hashraj says he asked his grandmother about what she received as share. She replied, 'Some dates.'"

There are lessons to be learnt from this story. The Prophet's query: "With whom have you come and with whose permission" is very important. Whenever a woman comes out of her house she should see to it that she is accompanied by a *Mahram.* Sometimes women who want to work for their religion become over-zealous and cross certain limits that they are supposed to stay within. For example, they begin to neglect their household duties and their children. It will be useful for such ladies to bear in mind a certain incident from *Seerah:*

Asma bint al-Yazeed (RA) was an Ansari woman. She once came to the Prophet (SAW) and said, "Women have sent me to you as their representative. What all of them are saying is similar to what I will say and they have the same point of view as I. Allah (SWT) sent you as a Prophet (SAW) to both men and women. Therefore we believed in you and obeyed you. However, as women, we are supposed to observe veil and remain inside our homes. Our duty is to keep our men satisfied and to look after their children. Men outdo us in matters such as the Friday congregational and funeral prayers and also in Jihad in the way of Allah (SWT). When they go to war, we protect their houses and tend their children. Will we get the same reward as them?" When the Prophet (SAW) heard this eloquent speech, he turned to his companions and asked them, "Have you ever heard a woman give a more excellent speech about her religion than this one?" All the companions of the Prophet (SAW) swore that they had not. Then the Prophet (SAW) turned to Asma (RA) and said, "O Asma, help me in conveying my answer to the women who sent you as their representative. Fulfilling your housekeeping responsibilities, keeping your husbands happy and co-operating with them, is equal to all those acts of the men that you have described." Asma (RA) returned happily after listening to this answer and did not raise any objection.

What we must learn from quoted incident is that our actual aim is to carry out the tasks that Allah (SWT) has assigned to us. If we assume certain duties that were never meant for us, it will be totally unfair to our own selves. In that case we would be in the danger of becoming the victims of the *Qur'an*ic prediction:

"We appoint for him that unto which he himself has turned." [al-Qur'an 4 :115]

Whenever an individual takes on unnecessary self-assigned duties, Allah (SWT) lets him carry them out but withdraws His help and support. And if, in the process, he happens to exceed Divinely ordained limits, he may end up among the unfortunate lot in the Hell according to the *Qur'an*ic words:

"We appoint for him that unto which he himself has turned and expose him unto Hell, a hapless journey's end" [al-Qur'an 4:115]

In short, women are exempted from any direct participation in the duty of establishing the *Deen*. They are indirectly involved, by taking care of the household and children in order to provide a harmonized atmosphere for the men, who are directly involved in this struggle. They should focus on fulfilling the responsibility of bringing up the children and of their education and moral guidance. In this way, men will have ample free time to devote themselves to the cause of Islam. If women facilitate their husbands' participation in this struggle for the supremacy of Islam, by relieving them of unnecessary burdens and by not being over-demanding. By doing this, they would be making the most valuable and a substantial contribution to this noble cause. After all why should they bother to come out if they can earn the same reward inside their homes!

Difference Between Bai'yah of Men and Women

Regarding the differences between men and women, a significant difference exists in the *Bai'yah*[29] of the two genders. Just before the *Hijrah*, the Prophet (SAW) took the pledge for *Iqamah al-Deen*, also known as the Second Pledge of 'Aqabah, only from his male companions. The terms of this oath were very strict and demanded the obedience to the *Ameer* – leader – under all circumstances, even if one has to force himself against his will. It also required one to obey all the persons in the hierarchy of authority other than the *Ameer*. Without a doubt the terms and conditions of this oath are very strict, but the formation of an organized and dedicated group of people who are ready to make any kind of sacrifice to bring about an Islamic revolution, cannot be achieved without such discipline. In the oath, therefore, the whole emphasis is on discipline and maintenance of this discipline is guaranteed positively by stressing the right attitude of "listen and obey" and negatively by sealing off all doors that might lead to disobedience or disorder in the ranks of the revolutionary group.

As far as the *Bai'yah* of women is concerned, at the occasion of the Second Pledge of 'Aqabah, there is no mention of ?????? either women not taking part in it, nor any mention of a separate *Bai'yah* for them (even though the presence of at least two women, at this occasion, is confirmed). However, the oath administered to women, as can be proved by the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, is basically an oath of piety and righteousness: to denounce all gods but Allah, to give up bad deeds – harming, lying, stealing, adultery, fabricating falsehoods and finally not to go against any order of Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAW). The wordings of this Bai'yah are same as that of the First Pledge of 'Aqabah, which took place a year before the second pledge, taken from twelve men from Yathrib (Madinah). This proves that the strict discipline, required of men, as members of an disciplined organization, is not required of women. This can be naturally explained by the fact that women are not supposed to directly participate in the highest stage of religious responsibilities. Their participation is more of an indirect nature[30].

[29] A pledge of allegiance

[30] It should be pointed out that the Bai'yah taken by the *Sufiyaah*, known as *Bai'yah al-Irshad*, is similar to the one taken by the women. This is due to the fact that the concept of *Iqamah al-Deen* as an obligation is non-existent among them.

Organization – Compulsory for Both Men and Women

Nonetheless, I believe that *Jama'ah* (organization) is necessary for both men and women. It provides a positive environment in which we take inspiration from others. It is while being a part of this collective existence that we find motivation to do more and more good deeds and the courage to abandon the *Nawahi* (the forbidden things). Therefore, Allah (SWT) has not deprived women of the blessings and spiritual benefits of belonging to an organization. Allah (SWT) says in *Surah* al-Taubah :

وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ وَالْمُؤْمِنٰتُ بَعْضُهُمْ اَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُوْنَ
بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيْمُوْنَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَيُؤْتُوْنَ
الزَّكٰوةَ وَيُطِيْعُوْنَ اللّٰهَ وَرَسُوْلَهٗ ؕ اُولٰٓئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللّٰهُ
اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَزِيْزٌ حَكِيْمٌ

"And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends of one another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and they pay the poor-due and they obey Allah and His messenger (SAW). As for these, Allah will have mercy on them. Lo! Allah is Mighty, Wise."

[al-Qur'an 9:71]

It was due to the blessings and benefits of the organizational environment that the Prophet (SAW) took *Bai'yah* from Muslim women as well. As a result, women felt that they were also part of an organization, that they too were affiliated with someone, that they also had to listen and obey the commands of the Prophet (saw), that they also had to do good deeds, that they were under an oath. This gave rise to the spirit of self-criticism, that if they deviated from their oath, then they would breaching a covenant and held responsible for it.

Consequently, we have a women's wing in Tanzeem-e-Islami and they also take *Bai'yah*. Our highest priority is to emulate, in all matters and as closely as humanly possible, the example set by our Prophet (SAW). Consequently, in the Tanzeem that we have formed for the purpose of bringing about an Islamic Revolution, we expect both men and women to refrain from evil and to struggle for making Allah's Word supreme and we consider both men and women as being bound by the pledge of allegiance occurring in the 111th verse of *Surah* al-Taubah[31]. However, the more stricter *Bai'yah* of "listening and obeying *fee al-Ma'roof*"[32], which

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[31] *"Allah hath purchased from the believers their lives and their wealth; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth through the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme."*
[al-Qur'an 9:111]

[32] "*Fee al-Ma'roof*" refers to obeying someone as long as the orders are

we find in an agreed-upon *Hadith*, has been exclusively reserved for men only. The oath administered to women is the one found in the 12th verse of *Surah* Mumtahanah[33]. In the said verse, instead of positive demand of "listen and obey", women are asked "not to disobey" the messenger of Allah (SWT). It is easy to note that the pledge of allegiance for women is much more lenient as compared to men. This is further supported by the fact that the above *Ayah* includes the wording of "*Fee Ma'roof*" even in the obedience to the Prophet (SAW).

In conclusion, women need to belong to a *Jama'ah* and to pledge allegiance to an *Ameer* so that they can have self-evaluation and a consciousness of being an active participant in the struggle for the establishment of *Deen*. However, they are not entrusted with the responsibility of directly taking part in this struggle. They have a comparatively more passive, but equally vital, role to play. Hence the best course of action for them is to stick to their Divinely-prescribed role. May Allah (SWT) prevent us from taking on unnecessary burdens and May He (SAW) help us in performing our duties in the best possible way. *Aameen*!

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within the bounds of *Shari'ah*. In case of the Prophet (SAW), such condition need not exist, however, for any other leader it is necessary to enforce this condition.

[33] "*O Prophet! when believing women come to thee to take the oath of allegiance to you that they will not associate in worship any other thing with Allah that they will not steal that they will not commit adultery (or fornication) that they will not kill their children that they will not utter slander intentionally forging falsehood and that they will not disobey you in any just matter, then you should receive their allegiance and pray to Allah for the forgiveness (of their sins): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful.*" *[al-Qur'an 60:12]*